1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: JOHNSON, NATHAN AND MARY (POLLY) PROPERTIES

Other Name/Site Number:

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 17-19 and 21 Seventh Street Not for publication: __

City/Town: New Bedford Vicinity: NA

State: MA County: Bristol Code: 05 Zip Code:19121

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property		Category of Property	
Private:	X	Building(s)	X
Public-Local:	___	District:	___
Public-State:	___	Site:	___
Public-Federal:	___	Structure:	___
		Object:	___

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
2		buildings
___		sites
___		structures
___		objects
2		0 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 2

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: County Street (National Register) Historic District

4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ____ nomination ____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

_____ _____
Signature of Certifying Official Date

_____
State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register criteria.

_____ _____
Signature of Commenting or Other Official Date

_____
State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

____ Entered in the National Register
____ Determined eligible for the National Register
____ Determined not eligible for the National Register
____ Removed from the National Register
____ Other (explain):

6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic:	Domestic	Sub: 17-19: religious facility/multiple dwelling 21: single dwelling
Current:	Domestic	Sub: 2 Multiple Dwellings

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: 17-19: Federal 21: Federal adjoining Greek Revival

MATERIALS:

Foundation:	17-19: brick	21: brick and rubblestone
Walls:	17-19: wood clapboard and shingle	21: wood shingle
Roof:	17-19: gable with asphalt shingles	21: gable with asphalt shingles
Other:		

Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

The Nathan and Mary (Polly) Johnson Properties range along the west side of Seventh Street in New Bedford, Massachusetts (Bristol County), just south of the street's intersection with Spring Street. Number 17 and 19, known locally as the old Friends meetinghouse, is a frame structure built up to the sidewalks on the north and east sides of the block; 21 Seventh, the longtime home of Nathan and Mary Johnson, is set back from the east sidewalk about ten feet. The former meetinghouse occupies a roughly rectangular lot (58 feet on the east, 74.68 feet on the north, 59.4 feet on the west, and 76. 11 feet on the south), while 21 Seventh Street stands on a narrow lot with a small setback at the rear. Together the lots comprise slightly more than half of the original 123.9-by- 104.5 -foot lot Nathan Johnson acquired from New Bedford whaling merchant Charles W. Morgan in 1829. The house at 96 Spring Street, in back and west of 17-19 Seventh Street, and the shop that once stood at 23 Seventh Street also belonged to the Johnsons.

The structures exist within a largely unaltered early nineteenth-century residential area built up between about 1800 and 1845 around the meetinghouse of the New Bedford Monthly Meeting of Friends, which stood originally on the lot of land northeast of the intersection of Spring and Seventh Streets. This lot has been occupied since 1821-22 by the Friends' brick meetinghouse. The neighborhood is sandwiched between Union Street, New Bedford's main commercial artery, on the north; County Street, the site of the many of the city's most elegant estates, on the west; a residential area on the south that terminates in the commercial and industrial South End of the city, abutting Buzzard's Bay; and a residential area on the east that terminates in state Route 18 abutting the city's waterfront along the Acushnet River. Historically, the principal east-west streets in this neighborhood ended at the wharves where whaling and trading vessels docked and at warehouses, shops, candleworks, ropeworks, and oil factories serving these industries. Spring Street ended at South Second Street (so named because it was the second north-south street from the river), the site of early shops, small houses, taverns, and sailors' boardinghouses. With few exceptions, the dwellings in this neighborhood are two- or two-and-a-half-story frame or brick homes, have small side and rear lots, and either are set back slightly from or abut the sidewalks; there are few carriage houses in the area, so close to the wharves, factories, and shops of antebellum New Bedford. The neighborhood was home to early whaling merchants and captains, well-to-do artisans and proprietors, and many boarders. Today, while some of its dwellings remain single-family homes, many, like both 1719 and 21 Seventh, have been converted into apartments or into professional offices.

17-19 Seventh Street

The former Friends meetinghouse, moved from its original to its current site sometime between 1821 and 1823, is a large, two-and-a-half story, six-bay, wood-frame house in Federal style with a gable roof parallel to Seventh Street; the secondary elevation and attached west ell are visible from the north, facing Spring Street. Records indicate that the building was constructed in 1785, when the larger Dartmouth Monthly Meeting of Friends deemed the New Bedford congregation large enough to build a separate meetinghouse.[1] By the early 1820s, however, the 1785 structure was too small for the

[1] New Bedford Friends had asked the Dartmouth Monthly Meeting "to consider whether it may not be needful to build a meeting house in or near said place" as early as February 1771. The committee appointed at the time to consider the request reported back to the meeting on 20 April 1772 and asked New Bedford Quakers to make "some trial of holding a

congregation, and even though it may for a time have occupied the same lot as the new brick meetinghouse being built, it was apparently moved to the corner diagonally across the Spring-Seventh Street intersection by August 1823. By October 1832, Nathan Johnson had the 1785 meetinghouse converted into a dwelling.[2]

Currently the meetinghouse sits on a high foundation consisting of painted bricks in good condition. The principal architectural feature is an enclosed projecting porch with a hipped roof at the center of the east elevation. The details indicate that the porch was constructed in the early nineteenth century. Two sets of steps, each with six risers, lead to the porch. The wide wood steps have molded edges and a simple wood balustrade with square pickets, newel posts, and molded handrails. The wood frame porch has three square columns separated by a fixed six-light sash, surmounted by a three-paneled lower section and topped with a three-light transom. The two wood entrance doors have two solid panels below four-lights, topped with a two-light transom. Vertical boards and two screened panels are used as infill for the foundation area of the porch. Four basement-level windows flank the porch. At the north and south corners are two small, ground-level vestibules that provide access to the basement probably built in the twentieth century. The shed roof vestibules have painted wood clapboards and single wood doors with four-lights and two solid panels below. The upper portion of the east elevation is clad with painted wood clapboards in excellent condition. The wood frame windows have splayed caps, projecting sills, and six-over-six wood and glass sash-all are in good condition. Small cornerboards frame the elevation. A projecting cornice with modillions and a suspended gutter with two downspouts cap the elevation. The roof is clad with modern asphalt shingles in good condition; several glass skylights and ventilating ridge louvers are visible. Two large chimneys project from the ridge; apparently constructed of reused brick, they appear to be in good condition.

The south elevation of the main block has four bays with similar windows as on the east elevation; two smaller windows are centered on the gable. A metal fire escape is attached to the southeast second-story window. The south elevation is clad with painted wood shingles in good condition, above a painted brick foundation in good condition. A small portion of the west elevation of the main block is visible from Spring Street. The wall is clad with similar painted shingles and brick foundation. Four stacked windows are of similar design as those on the east and south. The north elevation of the main block is clad with painted clapboards, with three window bays similar to those described earlier. A metal fire escape is attached to the wall and second-story window near the center of the elevation. Two centered windows below the ridge are similar to those of the south elevation.

The two-story gabled west ell is topped with asphalt shingles and a narrow brick chimney. Although

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meeting in a private house" before they built their own meetinghouse, and then in June 1773 the Dartmouth Meeting asked the Quarterly Meeting to advise them on the matter. Discussion of it seems to have been deferred, however, by the war. By March 1784 the committee on the New Bedford meetinghouse issue stated that Friends there may build a meetinghouse by raising subscriptions to do so; by December that year the Dartmouth Monthly Meeting created a committee for raising subscriptions for the meetinghouse, which was to be forty-eight by thirty-six feet and was estimated to cost 400 pounds. See *The Records of the Discipline of Friends, in the Monthly Meeting of Dartmouth Containing a Register of the Several Transactions, in the Affairs of the Church, vol.* 3, 10 mo 1762 - 6 mo 1785, Dartmouth Monthly Meeting Minutes, Records of Men's Friends, Old Dartmouth Historical Society, New Bedford, MA.

[2] See Appendix A, "History of the Properties," for a detailed discussion of the disposition and actions with respect to the old meetinghouse.

clad with similar painted wood clapboards, the trim pieces for doors and windows appear to be late nineteenth century; three window bays have six-over-six wood and glass sash. The door and foundation were not visible. The west elevation of the ell has three asymmetrically placed windows with six-over-six sash; the wall is clad with painted clapboards, edged with cornerboards, and topped with a small projecting cornice. A metal fire escape is attached to the wall at the northeast corner of the ell.

The structure occupies most of the property, except for a small enclosed yard at the northwest. A small front section retains evergreen plantings and a traditional-style low picket fence with square posts and narrow handrail. The northwest yard is enclosed with a high random-sized board fence with cap rail, all maintained in excellent painted condition. The building appears very well maintained and is in excellent condition. Although small in size, the potential remains for site archaeology. Further exterior and a comprehensive interior investigation are likely to determine the evolution of the structure, changes made when converted into a residential structure, and the overall integrity to the period of Frederick Douglass and Nathan and Mary Johnson. A brief partial inspection of the front hall and attic revealed early nineteenth-century details including a double staircase with elaborate turned newels, moldings, paneled doors and wide attic floorboards. The attic floor contains a trap door that permits access to a large crawl space between that floor and the high first-floor ceilings; this space, large enough to fit a group of people comfortably, has legendarily been associated with the concealment of fugitive slaves. A more in-depth investigation is highly recommended before any changes are made to the property that could result in the potential loss of character defining elements. Architectural and archaeological investigations may provide additional information relevant to the period of occupancy when the house may have played a role in the Underground Railroad.

21 Seventh Street
This dwelling, the home of Nathan and Polly Johnson, consists of two attached wood-frame structures. The front half is a modest, two-and-a-half- story, three-bay Greek Revival gable roof house with its principal front facing Seventh Street. It sits on a high brick and granite rubble foundation in fair condition, demonstrating evidence of brick and mortar failure due to moisture infiltration. The principal architectural feature is a late Victorian project flat pedimented entrance vestibule at the northeast end of the first story, with a straight-run staircase consisting of eight risers leading down to a granite step at the edge of the concrete sidewalk. The wide wood steps have molded edges and a Victorian-style wood balustrade with square pickets, handrail, and newel posts with turned ball finials. The vestibule is topped with a flat entablature with dentil moldings supported by flat end-pilasters with a deep recessed and arched panel. The Victorian-style eight-panel wood door with a centered glazed panel is framed by two four-light sidelights supported by a single recessed wood panel, with a single light transom above. The sidewalls of the vestibule have matching eight-light panels supported by a single recessed wood panel below. Wide square lattice is used as infill for the foundation level of the vestibule. Farther south is a basement entrance framed with twentieth-century details consisting of a triangular pediment supported by two flat pilasters surrounding a paneled wood door with a centered arched glazed panel. The opening is accessed by a series of modern brick masonry steps leading from the edge of the sidewalk down to the basement level. A single wood-frame basement window is at the southeast, with a six-over-six wood sash.

The wall above the foundation is clad with stained wood shingles in fair condition. The equally spaced wood frame windows on the first and second stories have projecting square sills and projecting molded

caps framing six-over-six wood and glass sash. At the attic story are two centered Italianate-style arched window frames with six-over-six sash with the upper sash arched to conform to the frames. All the windows and sash are in fair condition due to lack of maintenance. Two wide corner pilasters, each with a deeply recessed arched panel, supports the cornice return and entablature frieze with dentil moldings-all in fair condition due to lack of maintenance. Above this is a deep projecting rake molding. The south elevation of the main block has no windows; both are clad with similar wood shingles in fair condition, topped with the same cornice return as on the front elevation. The wooden shingles on both this and the back part of the house are not original to the house. An 1890s photograph shows the house sheathed in wood clapboards. The wood shingles were probably added in the mid-twentieth century when they came into widespread use in the area.

The roof is clad with modern asphalt shingles of undetermined condition. The granite rubble foundation is of undetermined condition due to heavy applications of paint. A brief interior inspection revealed mid- to late nineteenth-century details, including a curved staircase with a turned newel post and elaborate interior window molding. It appears likely that earlier details may be concealed by later paneling and finishes installed when the house was converted into apartments.

The rear two-story ell was built earlier than the front, and probably dates from ca. 1800. In April 1857, Polly Johnson, proprietor of the house since her husband had gone to California in 1849, asked the city for permission to "remove her building on Seventh Street to the rear of its present location." A week later the city's building committee permitted her to "make addition to her house on Seventh Street. Evidence suggests that the building originally faced Seventh Street, but was turned ninety degrees and moved back on the lot. The part of the house that currently fronts the street was then built on the spot where the former house stood.

The rear ell has a steep gable roof. The walls are clad with painted wood shingles in fair condition; the rubble foundation is in fair condition. The large centered rubble stone chimney is in poor condition. Random-sized and randomly placed window openings characterize the north, west, and south elevations but generally consist of six-over-six wood sash. Some of the wood frames have splayed lintels. It is apparent from the interior that earlier windows have been shingled over on the exterior while retaining casings and moldings visible from the interior. The west end of the ell consists of a modern two-story shed-roof extension clad with wood shingles, constructed in 1970 to house bathrooms and a stairwell. The primary entrance to the addition is centered on the south elevation, accessed by modern wood steps. However, the doorway moldings appear to the early nineteenth century. and the door is a paneled door that has been fitted with glass panels. One historic window remains on the south elevation and has early nineteenth-century twelve-over-twelve sash. A brief interior inspection revealed surviving early nineteenth-century details, including mantelpieces, door and window casings, molded baseboards, wide paneled flooring, and beaded cornerposts. Other details may be concealed by later modifications when the house was converted into apartments.

The entire structure occupies most of the property, except for a small enclosed open yard at the west. A small front section retains vegetation that includes a low hedge. The potential exists for site archaeology. In general, the building is in good condition. Further exterior and a comprehensive interior

investigation are likely to determine construction dates, the evolution of the two structures,[3] the overall integrity to the period of Frederick Douglass and Nathan and Polly Johnson, and the documented use of the structure as both a confectionary and a shelter for fugitive slaves. This investigation is highly recommended before further changes are made to the property that could result in the potential loss of character-defining elements.

[3] See Appendix A for a detailed discussion of the evidence about the presence and configuration of the buildings on this site.

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:
Nationally: X Statewide:___ Locally: ___

Applicable National Register Criteria: A_X_ B_X_ C___ D ___

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): A___ B_X_ C___ D___ E___ F___ G ___ _

NHL Criteria: 1 and 2

NHL Criteria Exception:

NHL Theme(s): II. Creating Social Institutions and Movements
2. Reform movements
IV. Shaping the Political Landscape
4. Political Ideas, Cultures, and Theories

Areas of Significance: Ethnic Heritage, Social History

Period(s) of Significance: 1824-63

Significant Dates: 1829, 1838

Significant Person(s): Douglass, Frederick

Cultural Affiliation: n/a

Architect/Builder: n/a

Historic Contexts: XXXI. Social and Humanitarian Movements
D. Abolitionism

State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

The Nathan and Mary (Polly) Johnson Properties are significant as a National Historic Landmark under Criteria 1 and 2 for Frederick Douglass's connection with 21 Seventh Street and for the role its longtime owner, Nathan Johnson, played in Douglass's life, in the antebellum effort to eradicate American slavery, and in assisting slaves escaping from the South. Both white and black abolitionists had actively helped fugitive slaves since at least as early as 1792, and fugitives came to the city in undetermined but probably high numbers through 1863.

The 21 Seventh Street home of Nathan and Polly Johnson was not only the first home of the famed fugitive Frederick Douglass after his 1838 escape from slavery, but it is the only one of Douglass's three New Bedford residences that survives. In addition, the house is documented to have housed at least one other fugitive slave, and from what is known of Nathan Johnson's antislavery work it is highly likely that it, and possibly 17-19 Seventh Street, harbored others. Douglass's intellect and temperament surely inclined him toward antislavery work, but Nathan Johnson and New Bedford provided him example and opportunity to grow into one of the most effective and renowned abolitionists of his time. He was not alone in this respect: the black mariners' advocate William P. Powell, the fugitives John S. Jacobs and Henry Box Brown, and the lecturer, novelist, and poet Frances Ellen Watkins Harper all began their careers in New Bedford, and both free and fugitive people of color substantially less known were initiated into antislavery work and into meaningful advocacy professions by the set of social and political circumstances the city presented.

In the realm of antislavery and abolitionist activity in antebellum Massachusetts, no communities were more significant than Boston and New Bedford, and in fact New Bedford's population of color was proportionately far larger than that of Boston. At the end of 1853, 1,600 people of color lived in New Bedford, whose total population was 18,000; only 900 more lived in Boston, a city of 140,000. The smaller city was 8.8 percent black at that time; Boston was 1. 8 percent black. No city in the Northeast, including Philadelphia, had a higher proportion of people of color in its population.[4] By mid-1857, fully 16.7 percent of all people of color in Massachusetts lived in New Bedford.[5] Moreover, while the black populations of most of the Northeast's cities tended to decline between 1850 and 1860, a fact many historians attribute in part to the passage and enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, the black

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[4] Figures on Philadelphia's black population differ markedly from source to source, ranging from 4.8 to 8.8 percent of total population in 1850. See Leonard Curry, *The Free Black in Urban America: The Shadow of the Dream* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 246, table A-2, who cites the higher figure; and Theodore Hershberg, ed. *Philadelphia: Work, Space, Family, and Group Experience in the 19th Century* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 465 table 1, 399. Philadelphia's free black population declined between 1840 and 1850 and increased at a much slower rate than it had historically between 1850 and 1860. James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *Black Bostonians: Family Life and Community Struggle in the Antebellum North* (New York and London: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1979), 2, states that people of color made up 3.9 percent of Philadelphia's population in 1860.

[5] These returns were reported in the *Republican Standard,* 22 December 1853, 28 September 1855, 17 July 1857, and 6 August 1857.

population of New Bedford increased, from 1,047 persons in 1850 to 1,518 persons in 1860, or from 6.3 to 6.8 percent of the population.[6] Moreover, in 1850 29.9 percent of New Bedford's population of color claimed to have been born in the South, compared to 15.0 percent of New York's and 16.6 percent of Boston's. That the city was attractive to people of color is unquestionable: it was, after all, the fourth largest port in the United States in 1845 in registered tonnage, and whaling and maritime trade, its principal industries, were historically the most welcoming of all occupations to men of color.[7]

Features other than economic also made the city appealing to African American people. Dartmouth, the township of which it was originally part, had been settled in the mid-seventeenth century by dissenting Baptists and Quakers (and some Congregationalists) who wished to escape from the rigid scrutiny of Plymouth Colony officials, and its population was heavily supplemented in the eighteenth century by Quakers from Nantucket, whose families had themselves migrated from southern New Hampshire and northeastern Massachusetts towns populated initially by religious dissenters.[8] The tradition of dissidence remained strong well into the nineteenth century, in large measure because of the reluctance of Quaker inhabitants to settle Congregationalist ministers and to pay taxes to support the Congregational church and colonial wars. It had also demonstrated a certain tolerance of diversity from its early days, an attitude that may have stemmed from the need to find adequate crew for an increasing number of vessels in the whaling industry, a cosmopolitan venture since at least the 1790s. By the 1830s, city native and journalist Charles T. Congdon once wrote, New Bedford was "a town of tars ":

> The whale-ships recruiting at the Sandwich or Society Islands brought back, besides oil and bone, not a few tattoed natives, with the sound of whose astonishing language I was familiar, though I did not understand a word of it.... Ships, indeed, came to us from all parts of the world. We had often walking about swarthy Portuguese sailors, and mariners of the true broad-bottomed Dutch type, puffing their long pipes mildly. I knew by sight, almost as soon as I knew anything, the flag of every important seagoing European nation,--the Union Jack of England, the different tricolors of France, of Germany, and of Russia, the yellow signal of Spain. All these nations wanted oil and candles, and came to New Bedford in pursuit of those commodities.[9]

The whaling industry not only made the small city far more diverse than almost any other city in the antebellum Northeast; it also made it rich. After reviewing the *Republican Standard's* decennial release of the estate valuations of individual taxpayers, the New York *Evening Post* observed in 1860, "In case of an equal distribution of property to every male citizen twenty-one years of age, the amount would be

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[6] These figures come from federal population schedules. My own count puts New Bedford's black population at 1,011 persons in 1850. The black population increased greatly over the course of the decade, reaching 1, 657 in 1855, and then appears to have declined slightly to 1,518 by 1860.

[7] See Pease, History of *New Bedford,* 37. New York, Boston, and New Orleans exceeded New Bedford in tonnage, and New Bedford's registered tonnage was nearly twice that of Philadelphia in 1845.

[8] See Byers, *Nation of Nantucket,* 32.

[9] Charles T. Congdon, *Reminiscences of a Journalist* (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1880), 14-15. See also the description of the city's diversity in Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* (1851; reprint, New York: Library of America, 1983), 827.

above $4,300 apiece; and if divided among all the inhabitants the share of each man, woman and child, would exceed $1000. There is not a city in the Union with such an aggregate of wealth according to the population."[10] The Post added, "With such an abundance of 'this world's goods,' New Bedford ought to be an urban paradise. " Indeed, influential people of color often so touted it. Falmouth native and *Colored American* editor Charles B. Ray wrote in 1837 of the city, "The people of color here are, perhaps, according to their number, better off than in any other place; nearly all of them, who are resident citizens, owning their own houses and lots, and many a number of houses, and are quite rich. " In another article published earlier the same year, Ray probably came closer to the real situation: of the estimated 1,200 people of color in the city, he stated, fifty owned real estate valued in the aggregate at $70,000.00. Six years later, Ezra R. Johnson, one of the town's leading African American merchants, put the combined value of estate (mostly real estate, he noted) in the hands of New Bedford people of color at $100,000.00, "and gradually increasing. We have few," he added, "in affluent circumstances."

Still, the political activity and degree of social organization among the city's people of color, coupled with some access to capital and integration in schools and some neighborhoods and workplaces, impressed black leaders. The fugitive and antislavery lecturer William Wells Brown wrote to Samuel May Jr. in 1847, "The colored people of New Bedford are in advance of the colored people of any other place that I have visited in the State, " a sentiment Frederick Douglass put in less qualified terms. "I now find that I could have landed in no other part of the United States, where I should have found a more striking and gratifying contrast to the condition of the free people of color in Baltimore, than I found here in New Bedford, " he wrote in his second autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom (1855).* ". . . here in New Bedford, it was my good fortune to see a pretty near approach to freedom on the part of the colored people."[11] Newspapers openly hostile to abolitionism inversely confirmed this view of the city: the *American Beacon* of Norfolk, Virginia, called New Bedford "that den of negro thieves and fugitive protectors" in 1854, and six years later the Boston *Pilot* termed it a it stronghold of Abolitionism—the very Sebastopol of Niggerdom. "[12]

In My *Bondage and My Freedom,* Douglass described the colored population of New Bedford as having

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[10] See *Republican Standard,* 16 August 1860, 2:5. By another measure—New Bedford's aggregate wealth of $10.8 million in 1854 and its official population of 20,391 in 1855—per capita wealth in New Bedford was $529.64. See Everett S. Allen, *Children of the Light: The Rise and Fall of New Bedford's Whaling and the Death of the Arctic Fleet* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971), 82.

[11] See Ray's articles *in Colored American,* 22 July 1837, 2:4, 3:1, and 11 March 1837, 4:2-*3.* Ezra Johnson's letter, dated 12 August 1843, was published in *Minutes of the National Convention of Colored Citizens: Held at Buffalo, on the 15th, 16th, 17th, 18th, and 19th of August, 1843* ... (New York: Pierce and Reed, 1843*);* William Wells Brown, Fitchburg, MA, 9 August 1847, to Samuel May Jr., quoted in C. Peter Ripley, *The Black Abolitionist Papers,* vol. 4, *The United States, 184 7-1858* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 3; Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855; reprint, New York: Library of America, 1994), 357.

[12] Boston *Pilot*, 11 August 1860, cited in Earl Francis Mulderink III, "'We Want a Country': African American and Irish American Community Life in New Bedford, Massachusetts, during the Civil War Era" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1995), 3*; American Beacon,* 17 January 1854.

been "educated to the point of fighting for their freedom, as well as speaking for it" and Nathan Johnson as a man who "was the owner of more books—the reader of more newspapers-was more conversant with the political and social condition of this nation and the world-than nine-tenths of all the slaveholders of Talbot County, Maryland."[13] In New Bedford few people of color were more important antislavery activists than Johnson, and in almost every respect his career is emblematic of how precarious existence was for men of color in the North-both what they were able to achieve, to a greater degree in New Bedford than perhaps in almost any other city in the North, and how tenuous that achievement could be among a people so thoroughly marginalized.

Johnson's origins are obscure. He may have been born in Philadelphia about 1795, and he was in New Bedford by 24 October 1819, when he married Mary J. Mingo Durfee, usually called Polly.[14] The couple were not listed in their own household in the 1820 census, and judging by numerous diary entries, letters, receipts, and deeds of the New Bedford merchant Charles Waln Morgan, it is probable that they were living in his household, where two people of color, one man and one woman of approximately the Johnsons' ages, were living in 1820. Morgan, a Philadelphia native, had married New Bedford's Sarah Rodman in June 1819. After their marriage, while they waited for their mansion on County Street to be built, they lived in a dwelling on Union Street, the city's main thoroughfare, between Sixth and Seventh Streets; the rear of this property must have abutted the lot of the first meetinghouse of New Bedford Quakers. One entry in the household accounts of Sarah Morgan is a debit for wages due "Polly Johnson (came to us 1st mo 22nd 1820)."[15] These records clearly show that the Morgans also employed Nathan Johnson, and at various times Polly Johnson's daughter, Rhoda Durfee (later Berry), did domestic work for the couple.

By 1845 the Johnsons owned a lot measuring 104.5 by 124.5 feet at the southwest corner of Spring and Seventh Streets, as well as the structures that stood upon it—the former Friends meetinghouse (17-19 Seventh), the two dwellings just south of it (21 and 23 Seventh Street), and a dwelling just west of it (96 Spring Street). From at least as early as 1836, the date of the first city directory, Mary Johnson lived at 21 Seventh Street until she died in 1871; except for the years he spent in California, Nathan Johnson lived there until his death in 1880.

Deeds and newspaper notices make clear that the Johnsons rented 96 Spring Street and 17-19 Seventh Street. When they lived at 21 Seventh Street, 23 Seventh Street was probably only a small structure and was called the "shop"; Mary Johnson's 1871 will refers to 23 Seventh Street as only a shop, so the dwelling at this address today must have replaced it sometime after that year. The Johnsons appear to have run their well-known confectionary from this 23 Seventh Street shop, and the first floor of 23 or

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[13] Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom,* 358, 355.

[14] Laura E. Beardsley, research services librarian at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, has not been able to find Johnson's birth record in extant church records nor a man of this name in the Pennsylvania Abolition Society's manumission records or in city directories between 1785 and 1800. The same records failed to yield the birthdate or presence in Philadelphia of Emily Brown, Johnson's mother and a New Bedford resident in the 1850s, or of Benjamin H. Johnson, who shipped with Nathan Johnson to California in 1849 and may have been his brother.

[15] Sarah Rodman Morgan account book, household expenses, 1820-35, collection 27, vol. 43, Morgan Papers.

21 Seventh Street may have housed Nathan's catering business or a dining room associated with it.[16] The Johnsons sold confections and ices of all sorts to New Bedford's wealthiest families, and the letters of abolitionist Debora Weston document that they also sold candies made from "free labor sugar"—that is, sugar harvested by free, not slave, labor—to consumers like Weston who supported the free produce movement.[17] In the 1830s Nathan Johnson had been partners in a restaurant with Thomas T. Robinson, also a man of color, and had been proprietor of a bathhouse on William Street; in the 1840s he operated a dry goods store on William Street and was part-owner of the whale ship *Draper.*[18] By 1850 Johnson was one of the two most affluent men of color in New Bedford; while still part of the city's "middling interest, " according to the city's Daily *Evening Standard,* Johnson's valuation was $18,700, just $3,500 less than the valuation ascribed to Richard Johnson, a trader who had married the widowed sister of esteemed black mariner Paul Cuffe and had been subscription agent for both the *Liberator* and the *Colored American.*[19]

More significant than his relative wealth, however, was Johnson's steadfast abolitionist activity. He was a delegate to the second annual convention of free people of color in Philadelphia in 1832, the only delegate from New Bedford and one of only two from Massachusetts.[20] With Richard Johnson, he attended the third annual convention of free people of color, also in Philadelphia, and was named one of four honorary members of that group. He was also a delegate to the fourth annual meeting of that group, held in New York City in June 1834, and one of two vice presidents elected at the fifth convention of the group, in Philadelphia in 1835. Two years later, he and other men of color in New Bedford met at the city's African Christian Church to establish an abolition strategy, and in 1839 he was appointed one of three men of color to discern the antislavery views of all Bristol County candidates for legislative office. In 1840 Johnson was elected one of five vice presidents of the Garrisonian Massachusetts

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[16] A 15 December 1898 article in the New Bedford *Sunday Standard* states that Polly Johnson "was famous as a cook and she made and sold cookies in the basement of the Seventh street house that are said by those who tasted them to have been more perfect cookies than we folks get nowadays. Mr. Johnson furnished dinners that were served on the first floor of the second story building next to the Seventh street house where they lived. " No other source states that 23 Seventh Street was two stories.

[17] Deborah Weston, New Bedford, to Anne Warren Weston, I February 1837, Weston Papers, Boston Public Library.

[18] Notice of the dissolution of Johnson's and Robinson's partnership appeared in the *New-Bedford Mercury,* 23 May 1834, 3:2. The 1845 New Bedford directory lists Johnson with a confectionary at 23 Seventh Street and a dry goods store at 63 William Street. Works Projects Administration, "Ship Registers of New Bedford, Massachusetts" (Boston: The National Archives Projects, 1940), 1:76, shows Johnson as part-owner of the *Draper* with Asa T. Lawton, John A. Parker and his son Frederick Oliver Prescott, and William R. Rotch, when the 1816 vessel was reregistered on 16 December 1847.

[19] *Daily Evening Standard* (New Bedford, Mass.), 18 September 1850, 3:2.

[20] Most of the information on Johnson's antislavery activity comes from various articles in *The Liberator,* 22 June 1833, 2 May 1835, 9 October 1840, 18 February 1842; the *Emancipator,* 16 November 1837; and Howard Holman Bell, ed., *Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions, 1830-1864* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969). Most of the information on Johnson's antislavery activity comes from various articles in *The Liberator,* 22 June 1833, 2 May 1835, 9 October 1840, 18 February 1842; the *Emancipator,* 16 November 1837; and Howard Holman Bell, ed., *Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions, 1830-1864* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969).

Anti-Slavery Society, and in 1847 he was elected president of the 1847 National Convention of Colored People, held at Troy, New York. He also worked as part of a local committee that investigated charges of discrimination brought by Shadrach Howard, a New Bedford man of color, against the New Bedford and Taunton Railroad in 1842.

Less well known, and less easily documented, are Johnson's activities on behalf of fugitive slaves. New Bedford's population of fugitives was large by any contemporary accounting, ranging from three hundred to seven hundred.[21] Documented instances of fugitives in New Bedford date from as early as 1792, before the first Fugitive Slave Law passed. Runaway notices were posted in New Bedford's newspaper through the 1790s for slaves who had stowed away on coasting vessels running between southern ports and the city; indeed, though the runaway advertisements disappeared from local media, the tendency of fugitives to escape to New Bedford by vessel only accelerated-and was so pronounced as to be regularly castigated in the newspapers of southern ports in the 1850s.[22]

Johnson's first known involvement with fugitive slaves took place in 1822, when he attended a local hearing in the case of John Randolph, a slave who had escaped to New Bedford in 1817 or 1818 and was being pursued by Camillus Griffith, an agent of the estate of Randolph's alleged former owner in Virginia. A half-century later Johnson told the New Bedford *Republican Standard* that at Griffith's hearing before local magistrates "a person stood behind him [presumably Griffith] with a heavy pair of tongs in his hand ready to brain him if there was any attempt made for Randolph's liberation."[23]

Johnson's attendance at the trial may well have been his initiation into antislavery and Underground Railroad work. He was in the thick of it on the night of 28 March 1827, when he, four other named men of color, and fully twenty other unnamed persons raided a New Bedford dwelling in which one John Howard was then living; with clubs and stones, they broke down the door, shattered the windows, and assaulted him. Court records are mute on the provocation of their assault, but the diary of New Bedford merchant Samuel Rodman Jr. states that Johnson's trial was "for an alleged riot occasioned by a visit of a coloured man from New York or farther south whose object it was to get information of run-away slaves." Rodman noted that his father, Samuel Rodman Sr., had remained in Taunton to attend Johnson's trial; all of the defendants were found not guilty and immediately released.[24] It seems likely that Johnson attended Quaker abolitionist Benjamin Lundy's lecture the next year on emancipating

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[21] These estimates may be found in Caroline Weston, New Bedford, to Wendell Phillips, 9 February 1845, Weston Papers, Boston Public Library; *Republican Standard,* 1 November 1850, 2:3; James Bunker Congdon, reply to queries of S. G. Howe, American Freeman's Inquiry Commission, 1863, NBFPL.

[22] See, for example, "From the Portsmouth Globe of Friday. Insult and Outrage upon the Rights of the South!" *The American Beacon, and Norfolk and Portsmouth Daily Advertiser,* 17 January 1854, 2:1. The incident was reported in the *Republican Standard* of New Bedford as "Fugitive Slaves," 12 January 1854, 2:3, "Tempest in a Teapot," 9 February 1854, 2:4, and "Virginians Aroused!," 13 March 1854, 2:1.

[23] "The Quakers and Slavery: A Fugitive Slave Case in New Bedford Fifty Years Ago," *Republican Standard* (New Bedford, Mass.), 14 March 1878, 3:1-3.

[24]Docket 71, April 1827 Term, Bristol County Supreme Judicial Court, 1822-28, vol. 4, Massachusetts Archives, Boston; Pease, ed., *Diary of Samuel Rodman,* 2 April 1827.

American slaves (perhaps the first antislavery lecture presented in the city) at the old Quaker meetinghouse, which stood on land he may have been leasing from Charles W. Morgan.

New Bedford Quakers William C. Taber and Joseph Ricketson brought the fugitive slave Frederick Douglass and his wife Anna to the home of Nathan Johnson in September 1838; there Douglass stayed for an unknown time until, by 1839, he was able to rent the rear of a dwelling on Elm Street for his family. Of the three dwellings in which Douglass lived in New Bedford through at least 1842, 21 Seventh Street is the only one that has survived. That Taber and Ricketson brought Douglass to Johnson's home suggests that it may have been a common practice among abolitionists to do so, and at least one other documented fugitive stayed at 21 Seventh Street. New Bedford Overseers of the Poor records include this entry on 12 February 1861: "Caroline Harris c [colored], fugative [sic] slave, came from south 3 month, has 1 child, coloured, 2 1/2 years old. 7th st. Rear of [Nathan Johnson crossed out] 21. (wid of Wm. Harris) 1/4 ton coal. " (Johnson's name was probably crossed out because he was still in California.)[25]

It is at least possible that the old Friends meetinghouse sheltered fugitives as well. A well concealed door in the floor of the building's attic permits access to a large crawl space between the attic and the high first story of the meetinghouse; this space, easily large enough for a group of people, has been legendarily associated with concealing fugitives, though no firm evidence of the practice has yet emerged.[26] This space at 17-19 Seventh Street awaits architectural and structural analysis before any conclusions about its origin or function can be drawn. Regardless of what may be learned about the structure's connection to Nathan Johnson's antislavery activity or the Underground Railroad, 17-19 Seventh Street is significant in its own right for being New Bedford's first house of public worship, for having been associated with "New Light" Quakers in New Bedford-the Friends who left the New Bedford Monthly Meeting between about 1819 and 1840, who tended to become Unitarian, and who were most prominently associated with abolitionism in the city-and for having been the site of Benjamin Lundy's 1828 antislavery address.[27]

Twenty-one Seventh Street was also a temporary home for several women of color sent to antebellum New Bedford to be educated. In 1834 Georgia plantation owner and slaveholder Patrick Gibson brought his slave Betsey and their daughters Helen and Jane to New Bedford and asked Johnson both to care for them and see to their education. Patrick Gibson corresponded regularly with Johnson and the women, sent money and cloth to the them, and visited when he could; his will, according to Betsey Gibson's

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[25] Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass Written by Himself* (1893; reprint, New York: Library of America, 1994), 650-51; New Bedford Overseers of the Poor Records, vol. 3, 1 March 1860-28 Feb 1861, NBFPL.

[26] Given the contention within most Quaker meetings (New Bedford's included) about slaveholding and abolition, it would seem unlikely that the congregation would have condoned hiding slaves within its meetinghouse or that individual members would have done so without the congregation's unanimous consent to it. It is more probable that individual members took fugitives into their houses, and instances of such assistance have been documented. Johnson may have concealed slaves at 17-19 Seventh Street after 1832, though the property was often rented to others.

[27] My research for an upcoming book on fugitive slave traffic and the meanings of abolitionism in New Bedford has found no earlier reference to a local antislavery lecture.

recollection, would manumit them. When Gibson died unexpectedly three years later, however, his will transferred ownership of his slaves to Edmund Molyneux, a business associate and the British consul in Savannah. Amid a testy correspondence about the women's expenses, Molyneux asked Johnson to bring the Gibson women to Newport that they might be shipped to Jamaica, where they and the rest of their family then still in Georgia would be free. Johnson suspected Molyneux intended to re-enslave the women, but upon assurances from Molyneux of his sincerity he ultimately took the women to Newport. The intervention of white abolitionists suspicious of Molyneux, however, prevented their departure. Receipt of Gibson's will in New Bedford revealed his failure to free them, and the women remained in New Bedford; others of Gibson's large number of slaves settled in the city in the 1850s as well.[28] Johnson also took charge of the daughters of fugitive slave William Wells Brown after Brown's divorce in 1847 and his decision to take a job as a lecturer with the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. Josephine and Clara Brown came to New Bedford that year, and Clara, or Clarissa, was still living at 21 Seventh Street in 1850; Josephine, educated in France and England after 1851, later wrote *Biography of an American Bondman, by His Daughter,* published in Boston in 1856.[29]

Nathan Johnson's familiarity with the fugitive slave community of New Bedford is also attested by Frederick Douglass's three narratives, which pass to Johnson the credit for his name. Nathan Johnson discouraged Douglass from keeping the surname Johnson, which he had taken after his escape during his brief stay in New York, because "'Johnson' had been assumed by nearly every slave who had arrived in New Bedford from Maryland, and this, much to the annoyance of the original 'Johnsons' (of whom there were many) in that place."[30] Douglass's accounts state that Nathan Johnson was reading Sir Walter Scott's verse "Lady of the Lake, " whose hero is the Scottish lord Douglas; the name, with an extra "s" Johnson suggested, became the fugitive's new name. If Nathan Johnson was a native Philadelphian, he may have struck upon the double "s" because it was the spelling of the surname of the Rev. Robert and Grace Douglass, who were prominent in Philadelphia's black community at the time Johnson probably came to New Bedford.

In New Bedford Douglass found others like Johnson, men and women who actively contested discrimination as it presented itself in the North and fought every effort to detach-physically, politically, and spiritually—the nation's free people of color from the millions enslaved in the South. Every principal antislavery lecturer in the United States spoke in New Bedford, many of them repeatedly, and some abolitionists seem to have approached the city as a test case in the struggle for equal rights. In the summer of 1841 local men of color Nathaniel A. Borden and Shadrach Howard challenged the practice of the New Bedford and Taunton Railroad of using a "small car," partitioned in two to house people of color on one side and unruly, drunk, and "otherwise offensive" persons on the other. In 1845 Borden

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[28] Betsey Gibson Papers, NBFPL, and Earl Mulderink, "'The Whole Town in Ringing with It': Slave Kidnapping Charges against Nathan Johnson of New Bedford, Massachusetts, 1839, " *New England Quarterly* 61, 3 (October 1988): 341-57. Misinformed residents spread a rumor that Johnson had kidnapped the women and taken them to Newport to facilitate their reenslavement, but Johnson was exonerated of these charges in an investigation by the Young Men's Antislavery Society of New Bedford

[29] Dorothy Sterling, ed., *We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1984), 139-47.

[30] Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom,* 354.

offered himself up again to test the liberality of the Lyceum, the local lecture association. The group's refusal to accept him as a member provoked a controversy that was reported and commented upon throughout the Northeast and instigated the well-publicized refusal of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Charles Sumner to speak before a group whose membership was racially proscribed. Both Howard and Borden were living in New Bedford during Douglass's time there, as was William Powell, a blacksmith and boardinghouse keeper who was one of the founders of the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1833. Powell was the secretary of New Bedford's Union Society, formed in 1834 among the city's colored population as an auxiliary to the General Convention of Free People of Color, and he was one of two Massachusetts delegates to the convention's fifth annual meeting in Philadelphia in June 1835. A well-known and frequently published Garrisonian, Powell went on to establish a colored seamen's boardinghouse in New York, wrote the first known description and analysis of American mariners of color, and was the man most often sought out by American fugitives fleeing to England after he settled in Liverpool in 1851.

By 1843, according to Ezra Johnson, New Bedford's people of color supported "2 churches, with 200 members inclusive; one a Christian Baptist, the other an Independent Methodist; both are under the pastoral charge of colored ministers; 2 literary societies, with 50 members; 6 benevolent societies, with 160 members; 1 Sabbath-school, with 40 members-a considerable number attend the white schools and churches." Its schools were, at least formally, integrated, and Douglass himself, though unable to work at his trade as caulker, did secure employment among largely white workforces at Joseph Ricketson's candleworks, on George Howland's wharves, and at Gideon Richmond's brass foundry. At the foundry he improved his ability to read and reason and taught himself about politics by reading newspapers tacked up near his bellows. One of them was the *Liberator,* a subscription to which was extended him in New Bedford by a "young man" whom Douglass never identified in January or February 1839. Douglass always credited the *Liberator* with his true political awakening.

During that year Douglass was licensed to preach in the local African Methodist Episcopal Zion church, and he also began taking active part in antislavery meetings. The first record of Douglass in local newspapers may document his first public lecture: on 12 March 1839 at the Third Christian Church (one of the city's two churches started by people of color), Douglass spoke to a black audience against the American Colonization Society. Douglass may have heard William Lloyd Garrison for the first time the next month, which may also have been Garrison's first lecture in New Bedford and the address that converted Samuel Rodman Jr. to abolitionism. In the same year, young men of color in New Bedford, including Powell, formed the Young Men's Wilberforce Debating Society, and colored citizens issued resolutions condemning the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society for introducing "subjects foreign to the cause of the slave" into its meetings and thus tending to "clog the wheels of the abolition car." "Sectarianism and disorganization," they averred, "have not as yet seduced us from our duty to the cause of the slave."[31]

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[31] On Douglass's first public lecture, see John W. Blassingame, ed. *The Frederick Douglass Papers: Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), 1: lxxxvii-cii. For the colored community's critique of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, see "Another Voice from the Colored People of New Bedford," *Liberator,* 18 October 1839, 167:2; throughout the schism between "old organization" Garrisonians, and "new organization" abolitionists, who formed the American and Foreign Antislavery Society and the Massachusetts

Even though abolition may not have been the general sentiment among whites in New Bedford in 1839-after a poorly attended antislavery lecture at the end of 1839, Samuel Rodman Jr. observed that "the abolition zeal of our community is not warm enough to resist a low point in the scale of Farenheit [sic] "-it clearly was among the politically active members of the community of color. Rodman noted that people of color were the primary audience at several antislavery lectures in these years, and at least some white abolitionists perceived them to have political power as well. Garrisonian abolitionist Debora Weston, then teaching school in New Bedford as well as conducting antislavery petition drives and generally mobilizing abolitionist feeling, noted on 8 November 1839 that "the whole town is up in arms about the Elections, which are very closely contested, & as the col'd people hold the balance of power all the politicians are violent abolitionists. " Indeed, a committee of colored men interrogated all candidates for town, county, and state offices and with other abolitionists offered their own ticket in 1839.[32]

Douglass's next known public appearance was in early July 1841, as chair of a meeting of New Bedford colored citizens who denounced the effort of Maryland slaveowners to force free black Marylanders to resettle in Africa. His third address came two months later, at the Bristol County Anti-Slavery Society's meeting in New Bedford on 9 August. If Douglass had not heard Garrison during his visit to the city in 1839 or in April of that year, he surely heard him at this August meeting. According to historian John Blassingame, Douglass's "first brief speech before the Garrisonian Bristol County Anti-Slavery Society in New Bedford on 9 August 1841 so impressed his audience that a group of abolitionists paid his expenses to Nantucket." And it is probably due to New Bedford bookseller William C. Coffin that Douglass first came to the attention of influential abolitionists. He wrote in 1855, "Mr. William C. Coffin, a prominent abolitionist in those days of trial, had heard me speaking to my colored friends, in the little school-house on Second street, New Bedford, where we worshipped. He sought me out in the crowd, and invited me to say a few words" at the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society convention on Nantucket. His address on the morning of 12 August 1842 launched his long career in antislavery and equal rights.[33]

Nathan Johnson's career, however, took a different path. As S. Griffits Morgan had pointed out, his California experience was not initially a good one, and it is doubtful that it improved by the time he returned to New Bedford. On 18 February 1873 he wrote to Gerrit Smith from 21 Seventh Street simply to remind the Upstate New York abolitionist who he was:

> I know you do not remember of having seen me, and there are but few living that could tell you

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Abolition Society, New Bedford's black activists were firmly "old" abolitionists. Douglass stated that he first heard Garrison speak at Liberty Hall in New Bedford; Rodman's diary and other sources document Garrison lectures at that spot (not then called Liberty Hall) on 13 April 1839 and 25 April 1841.

[32] See Rodman's diary entry dated 30 December 1839 for his quote on New Bedford abolition sentiment in Pease, Diary *of Samuel Rodman.* See Debora Weston, New Bedford, to Maria Weston Chapman, 8 November 1839, Weston Papers, for the comment on political activity in 1839.

[33] New Bedford *Register,* 7 July 1841, 3:1; Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 63; Blassingame, *Frederick Douglass Papers, 1: xlvi;* Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom,* 364-65; Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass,* 368.

> anything about me. When by the agency of C. B. Ray, you were giving farmes to suffering and needy colord men, I stood back, because at that time I was doing well, and would not take what I thought would fall to the hands of the more needy. To our Labouring friend F. Douglass I cannot refer you, for a fellow townsman was at Washington, not long since, where he conversed with him, and mention'd me to him, and he said he did not know me; but I will refer you to his Narative, in which you will see the name, Nathan Johnson. Wm. L. Garrison would speak to you of me altho, it is something like 30 years since we have seen each other."[34]

Smith responded to Johnson's letter, and on 27 February Johnson wrote him again:

> My Dear Friend in nameing your giving farmes to abused and needy colord men, was only to let you know that I was not ignorant of the much that you have done for the Race.... A farm, Sir was no part of my solicitation but simply a pittence paradventure a loose, unappropriated greenback, to healp me through the present year; if I should tarry longer things will grow better for me, and 78 years tells me I need but little here.[35]

Johnson was living in the basement of 21 Seventh Street when, in late September or early October 1880, he suffered a stroke. Johnson died at the home of an adopted daughter on 11 October 1880. He is buried in the old section of New Bedford's Oak Grove Cemetery with his wife Mary, his mother Emely Brown, Anna Mingo (Mary Johnson's mother), Mary Johnson Buchanan, Thomas P. and Patience Durfee Buchanan, and the Buchanan's daughter Elizabeth. The inscription on Nathan Johnson's gravestone reads, "Freedom for All Mankind. "

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[34] Nathan Johnson, New Bedford, to Gerrit Smith, 18 February 1873, Gerrit Smith Papers, Arents Research Library, Syracuse University, Syracuse, N.Y. Johnson's reference is to the fact that in August 1846 Smith had asked Ray to help identify temperate and industrious men of color principally in New York City to whom he might give land "acquired principally by my father," a partner in the fur trade with John Jacob Astor, so that they might then qualify to vote in New York State. The franchise had been taken away from men of color by the revised state constitution in 1826. When Ray failed to produce enough names, Smith extended the search to other New York places and even to other states.

[35] Johnson to Smith, 27 February 1873, Gerrit Smith Papers.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

___Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
___Previously Listed in the National Register.
___Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
___Designated a National Historic Landmark. Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey:
___Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record:

Primary Location of Additional Data:

_X_State Historic Preservation Office
___Other State Agency
___Federal Agency
___Local Government
___University
___Other (Specify Repository):

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: less than one acre

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing
	19	339320	4610610

Verbal Boundary Description:

The National Historic Landmark nomination includes the frame dwellings and property situated in the City of New Bedford, Massachusetts, being part of lot 46 of the City of New Bedford as recorded in the Bristol County Registry of Deeds, and being bounded and more particularly described as follows:

Beginning at the northeasterly corner at a point marked by a drill hole in the west line of Seventh Street distant southerly therein 90.75 feet from a bound stone at its intersection with the south line of Spring Street, said drill hole being located at or near the middle of a walk now laid between the dwelling house on this lot and that on the lot next northerly; thence westerly at right angles with said west line of Seventh Street in a line running in or near the middle of said walk 70.00 feet to a corner and to a fence running northerly and southerly thence southerly and parallel with Seventh Street, as the said fence now runs, 2.50 feet to a corner; thence westerly in a line perpendicular with said Seventh Street 35.58 feet to the northwest corner of this lot; thence southerly in line parallel to Seventh Street 18.82 feet; thence easterly at right angles with said west line of Seventh Street 29.50 feet; thence northerly at right angles with said south line of Spring Street 76.90 feet to a northwest corner thence easterly at right angles with said west line of Seventh Street 74.68 to the place of beginning. The two lots contain 0. 17 acre in lot 46.

Boundary Justification:

The nominated properties include the former home and archaeological remains associated with Nathan and Polly Johnson and Frederick Douglass and the former Friends meetinghouse which Nathan Johnson converted into a dwelling during the period of significance. Because the two properties were never transferred as one unit, no deed of purchase spells out the precise property boundaries described above. The NHL boundaries coincide most closely with property boundaries as specified in the 1924 deed of purchase to Emma S. Y. Alley of New Bedford.

11. FORM PREPARED BY

Name/Title: Kathryn Grover, Waterfront Historic Area League (WHALE) and Richard Crisson, Historical Architect, National Park Service

Telephone: 508-994-4062

Date: 20 January 1999